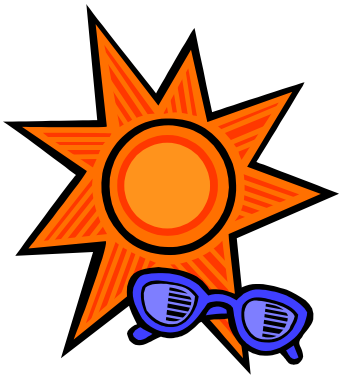

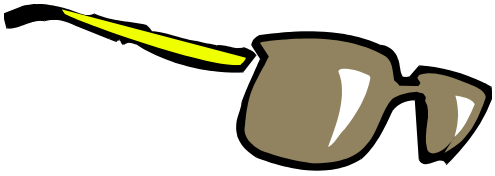

PROTECT YOUR EYES FROM THE SUN

As you pack your sunscreen and other items to enjoy your favorite outdoor activity, don't forget to bring along some ultraviolet radiation protection for your eyes. Wearing sunglasses that block the sun's glare without screening ultraviolet (UV) radiation may actually cause eyes more harm than good, warns NERO Safety. "Not all sunglasses block UV radiation," says Bob Bessette, Safety Specialist. "In fact, products that shade the eyes without screening UV radiation may dilate the pupils and let in more harmful rays."

The sun emits many types of radiation, including visible light – what we see as color; infrared rays - invisible but felt as heat; and ultraviolet rays - also invisible but often called the sunburn rays. According to PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA, the UV radiation that has been linked with eye damage is divided into several categories, including UV-A and UV-B.

Long-term exposure to UV rays contributes to the development of cataracts; pterygium (tissue growth on the white of the eye that can advance to block vision); skin cancer around the eyes; and macular degeneration, the leading cause of vision loss among older Americans. Excessive short-term exposure can cause sunburn to the eyelids and photokeratitis, a painful sunburn of the cornea.

While everyone is at risk of UV's harmful effects, certain individuals are at increased risk, especially those spending long hours in the sun because of work or recreation. Additionally, individuals with certain retinal disorders, and persons taking particular medications, such as tetracycline, are more sensitive to UV rays. UV radiation is greatest during the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., when 60% of the effective UV radiation reaches the earth's surface. The amount of UV radiation reaching your eyes also increases greatly at high altitudes and closer to the equator.

PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA and NERO offer the following tips for maximum UV protection:

- Select sunglasses that provide 99-100 percent protection from both UV-A and UV-B. Avoid products that say "Provides UV Protection" without specifying exactly how much UV radiation the product blocks.
- Examine the lenses for scratches, bubbles, or distortions. The lenses should be perfectly matched in color.
- Sunglasses should also block 75-90% of the visible light spectrum.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen, and quality sunglasses for maximum protection!

UV protection in eyewear is inexpensive, does not interfere with vision, and can be incorporated into nearly all optical materials currently in use. Whether your sunglass lenses are polarized, mirrored, or photochromic is purely a personal preference. As long as the lenses absorb the necessary amount of UV radiation, they will protect your eyes. Comfort and fashion are important, but an even better reason to wear sunglasses is your eye health.

For additional tips on selecting sunwear, call PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA at 1-800-331-2020.

BE SAFE!